LIFE IN A STOCK COMPANY

1862—1863

" I think anything, naturally written, ought to be in everybody's way that pretends to be an actor." This remark of Colley Gibber's long ago struck me as an excellent motto for beginning on the stage. The ambitious boy thinks of Hamlet, the ambitious girl of Lady Macbeth or Rosalind, but where shall we find the young actor and actress whose heart is set on being useful ?

Usefulness ! It is not a fascinating word, and the quality is not one of which the aspiring spirit can dream o' nights, yet on the stage it is the first thing to aim at. Not until we have learned to be useful can we afford to do what we like. The tragedian will always be a limited tragedian if he has not learned how to laugh. The comedian who cannot weep will never touch the highest levels of mirth.

It was in the stock companies that we learned the great lesson of usefulness; we played everything—tragedy, comedy, farce, and burlesque. There was no question of parts " suiting" us ; we had to take what we were given.

The first time I was cast for a part in a burlesque I told the stage manager I couldn't sing and I couldn't dance. His reply was short and to the point. " You've got to do it," and so I did it in a way—a very funny way at first, no doubt. • It was admirable training, for it took all the self-consciousness out of rne to start with. To end with, I thought it capital fun, and enjoyed burlesque

as much as Shakespeare.

What was a stock company ? I forget that in these days the question may be asked in all good faith, and that it is necessary to answer it. Well, then, a stock company was